Empirical Study: The Perspectives of Employers on Graduate Skills

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Core Themes to be Covered

- Curriculum Development
- Work Skills
- Academic Expectations
- Workplace Expectations
- Employer Expectations

Employability
Employer Perspective on Employability Skills

Employers view graduate employability skills as comprised of generic skills, personal attributes and knowledge skills.
• A questionnaire was sent to employers and was complemented with interviews

• Three main skill categories involved: core generic skills, personal attributes and knowledge skills.

• Companies were asked to highlight skills that they expected graduates to bring to the workplace.

• Employability skills were derived from the Behaviour Competency Dictionary of Organizational Readiness
The sample was stratified into 10 industry sectors.

To be included, a company should have existed for at least 5 years.

A questionnaire was sent to 56 companies.

32 responses were received.

10 companies with one company representing each sector were followed up with in-depth interviews.
Data Collection

- Interviews were conducted with managers responsible for graduate placements.
- The interviews provided authentic accounts of employers' perceptions on employability skills.
- The questions were designed to elicit free flowing narratives regarding the expectations of the employers.
- The interviews provided an understanding of how companies construct the meaning and significance of skills.
The technique linked in-depth explanations to the theoretical concepts discussed in the literature review.

The responses confirmed that academic qualifications are important, but no longer sufficient to secure employment.

Employers expected graduates to have skills so that they can make an immediate contribution when recruited.

Employers expressed dissatisfaction with the low level of preparedness of graduates at entry-level into employment.
Findings from Employers

- Taking employer perspectives in skills development can enhance graduate potential for success in recruitment.
- Involving employers in curriculum development can produce graduates that make a dynamic start and can adapt quickly.
- Soft skills were considered to have more weight than technical skills.
- Employers considered degrees as less important than the ability to demonstrate effective work skills.
- Employers suggested developing employability skills modules and extra-curricular activities that enhance skills.
• Employers believed that academics are sceptical about incorporating employability skills into their curriculum
• Employers valued personal qualities and traits than technical competence
• Employers preferred to train graduate recruits on technical aspects of their jobs in-house
• Multi-task, loyalty and multi-cultural sensitivity also emerged as important attributes for new graduate recruits
Higher Education Emphasis

Academics

- Academic qualifications
- Curriculum content
- Course design
- Academic objectives
**Employer Emphasis**

- Involvement in curriculum design
- Generic skills and competencies
- Developing collaborative relationships
- Work placements as part of degree program
- Balancing education with workplace expectations
Workplace Skills Emphasised by Employers

Skills

- Flexibility
- Decision making
- Time Management
- Problem solving
- Analytical
- Teamwork
- Communication
- Organisation & Prioritization
- Creativity
- Initiative
Employers expected graduates to have degree competencies that are supported by solid soft skills and personal attributes.
Recommendations

- Industry Advisory and Steering Boards
- Curriculum that supports Skills
- Articulate transferable skills in students
- Establish Appropriate duration for work placements
- Develop skill-based extracurricular activities
- Conduct employability skills workshops
Developing Graduate Employability Skills
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